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Kiosk Fever

They May Have Gotten Off To A Slow Start,
But These Self-Serve Digital Photo Kiosks
With Cool New Features Are All The Rage

by Donna Rogers Kranich

It can get addictive like online sites for virtual games, sometimes known as "sticky" sites because of the extended length of time we linger there.

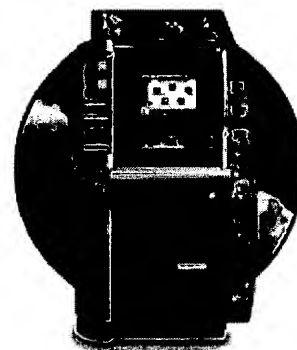


Photo kiosks, while they're not exactly new, may be a creative and fun way for avid picture-takers to have a real hands-on picture-making experience. All the major photo companies are hitting the pavement with new digital kiosks and workstations. Two words describe these new models: sexy and sleek.

On a recent round to the latest digital photo kiosks in retail locations near my home I came back with a handful of wallets, a number of 5x7s, various combination packages and a bunch of images uploaded to a web site for sharing with family and friends.

These multimedia, web-enabled, and self-contained photo centers can do a lot. But first, what's the point of using a self-serve kiosk rather than a professional lab or your personal printer? Creative control, for one. Sometimes you just can't explain to a clerk exactly how you want your image cropped or color corrected. The kiosks give you control over cropping, color balance, brightness, and other editing. You may never again have to hand your digital or film media over the counter to get reprints again.

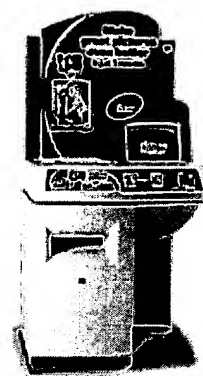
In a hurry? Take a negative or a print down to your local photo shop on Saturday afternoon, and in 10 minutes turn it into an 8x10. (But leave yourself some extra time in case you start to get hooked.)

Pixel Magic Kiosks

Digital Print Stations (DPS) from Pixel Magic Imaging are just appearing in chain drug stores, consumer electronic stores and in entertainment venues and vacation spots. Designed specially for the digicam user, these accept digital camera media such as CompactFlash, SmartMedia, and MemoryStick, as well as CDs and Zip disks. An optional scanner allows use of negatives and prints. Voice prompts guide you through three simple steps. The process is dye sub, and you have a choice of glossy or matte finish paper, depending on the retailer. You can even burn your images onto a CD while you wait.

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Introduced in 1995, the company's older Photo Ditto machines (print to print) have undergone some updates and are still very popular. If you have your family album photos in an undeniably unorganized clutter, Photo Ditto, Version 5.0 can digitize each print, and clean it up, too. Applied Science Fiction's digital ICE (Image Correction and Enhancement) and digital ROC (Reconstruction of Color) tools can restore color and fill the ugly cracks and scratches on old, damaged photographs.



You will find this kiosk in Eckerd Drugs and Meijer Superstores, and of late in supermarkets, especially those equipped with 1-hour labs. Photo Ditto can crop, zoom, remove redeye, rotate, and add personalized messages and borders. In addition to those features, DPS permits one-touch contrast correction for underexposed images. The newest equipment allows you to swipe your credit card in a scanner, get a receipt and print the enlargement—all without any counter staff intervention.

Want to do a favorite scenic in a matching calendar, mug and mousepad? Go to MyPhotoLab.com, which all the Pixel Magic kiosks are equipped with. It's a web store that allows you to upload or download, modify, share, and order prints and photo gifts online. Family and friends can also visit the site from any computer with Internet access to order additional prints or gifts. Select an image, marry it with an item, and it will be direct shipped to you within a week.

Both Digital Print Stations and Photo Ditto kiosks can connect to some digital mini-labs for printing on traditional silver-halide paper. In addition, the optional Backlab Film Scanning System can scan conventional film and save it to a floppy or CD.

Kodak Picture Maker

Kodak's Picture Maker digital kiosks, evolving since 1995, are installed in 18,000 locations domestically and 30,000 worldwide. In December 2000 Kinko's, Inc. announced the first phase in deploying digital photo kiosks in more than 700 of its US stores.

The Picture Maker offers dye sublimation output through a thermal transfer process. It prints up to 8x10 prints in color or black and white, from input including JPEGs from any floppy diskette or CD, from Kodak's PictureCD, PictureDisk or PhotoNet on-line services, or from your digital camera's SmartMedia, CompactFlash or MemoryStick media. Optional scanners allow slides, APS or negatives to be used. As we write, the Kinko's installation seems to be the first fully-connected, nationwide self-serve box out there.

Using PhotoNet Online and America Online's You've Got Pictures (services that are available for about \$6 and \$9, respectively, when you have your film processed by Kodak), you can place your images into albums online, allowing family and friends to share them. Using an access code, they can view the family reunion pictures from any computer connected to the Internet or from another connected Picture Maker anywhere in the country.

This is a good alternative to e-mail if relatives don't have Internet access. Each person accessing the images can then use all the features available—crop, zoom, reduce redeye, restore colors, add text and borders or make any other personal adjustments, and pay for their own prints—without getting you involved!

Picture Maker offers the widest variety of package prints to choose from, including wallets, ID photos and smaller luggage tag images. With appropriate optional software chosen by the retailer you also can have the ability to write a high-res JPEG to a floppy. And Kodak kiosks coming this summer will be incorporating animation and voice.

Fujifilm's Aladdin Picture Center

Fujifilm's Aladdin Picture Center with built-in Fujifilm Pictography 3000 offers outstanding digital prints, as well as optional output to Fujifilm's Digital Minilab Frontier, if you just won't do with less than prints on regular photographic paper. It also has image enhancement and manipulation capabilities—it can rotate, zoom, crop and reduce redeye.

The Aladdin Digital Photo Center is Fujifilm's latest offering. Use it to order high-quality silver-halide prints from your choice of digital cameras, CDs, floppies and other digital media including SmartMedia, CompactFlash, PC Cards and MemoryStick. Finally, with the addition of a flat bed scanner, you can get print-to-print orders. Various kiosks will also have a choice of papers output from either a TA (Thermal Autochrome) or a Pictography printer. For sharpest digital enlargements go with the Pictography option.

At the time of processing or—a nice feature—even afterward, you can simply request the "Filmless Reorder Service." Then, review the photos at home, revisit the retailer at a future time (usually within a week), access your negatives via the kiosk, and place additional orders for greeting cards, extra prints, etc. quickly and easily.

The Digital Photo Center, in conjunction with the Frontier system and new Fujifilm Photo Imaging Controller, allows you to transfer images to Fujicolor CDs or floppies for long-term storage.

It also offers connectivity with Fujifilm.Net where images can be uploaded to the site. Using a password you can get immediate thumbnails on your home computer that can be easily shared online with family and friends via e-mail. From their home computers they can order their own reprints, enlargements, photo gifts and specialty items.

Gift List

Kiosks do offer some great gifting possibilities. How about e-mailed birth announcements, an online album tracing your genealogy, a personal screensaver, a framed 8x10 of the fishing trip for your dad's office, six 5x7s of the group at the ski house or a fun pair of boxers for your significant other?

Okay, let's say you've got some terrific shots of your buddy's wedding in the Turks and Caicos. You'd like to share them around the office, and with a couple of friends who couldn't make it. And, as a token of your appreciation for the newlyweds, you'd like to present them with a keepsake.

First, upload the photos to any of the web sites mentioned. Working on the Photo Ditto and DPS, you could have a baseball cap and a sweatshirt made up for him, while her gift would be a romantic beach scene transferred to coasters for the new house. You could also make a collage to frame for yourself or store an album of keepsakes online. Finally, the happy couple could use one of your photos for their thank yous.

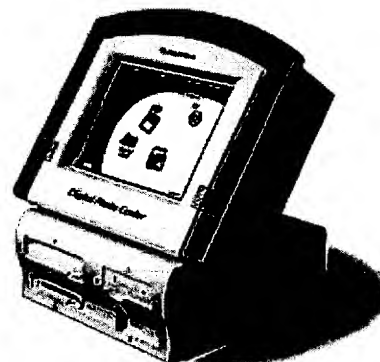
In addition to enlargements and photo packages, the Fujifilm Aladdin DPC allows you to manipulate up to three different prints on a sheet, called Album Prints, add text, alter its placement and choice of fonts, and add an antiqued look with a sepia or black and white print. Calendars, greeting cards and occasion prints (trading cards and special greetings) are also options.

Kodak Picture Maker has myriad reprint packages—any combination of sizes on a sheet, plus a luggage ID size. As of yet, it doesn't have specialty gifting possibilities available, though that's probably on the way. As for now, gift items like T-shirts, calendars and laminated silhouetted prints can be had in the old-fashioned way—through your photo retailer.

The Real Deal

As with anything new, expect a little bit of a learning curve. Don't assume you'll get free reign in operating the machine right away—at times store staff protectiveness can be downright irritating—though when you do begin to feel comfortable you can pretty much run through the process solo and simply call the staff for the password when you're ready to print.

At the beginning it's probably best to have assistance from the staff, as they will toss out any inaccurately exposed prints they are responsible for. In my field tests, the staff varied from being pretty confident—



quickly adjusting brightness, hue and cropping and producing good prints the first time around—to those who were absolutely clueless and could not even rotate the photo right side up. Sometimes they even allowed scratches, blotches and unbalanced color to pass as okay. Shop around for the best match of hardware/peripherals and staff that meets your needs.

The upshot is that photo kiosks are great for your digital media or for images to be uploaded or downloaded to or from an online service. However, when you're looking for a simple enlargement from a negative, you might be better served with conventional lab services.

Costs Of Kiosk Services

Here's a quick breakdown of some of the services offered by kiosks and approximate prices for each. Many vary by retailer, and type of output, but most services fall into a comparable price range.

Kodak Picture Maker

- Upload a roll of film to Kodak PhotoNet Online: \$6
(This includes scanning, upload to Kodak PhotoNet online, and the first 30 days of storage. After 30 days, you can purchase additional storage time at \$1.49 per roll/month.)
- Upload a roll of film to America Online's You've Got Pictures: \$9
- You can also get a Picture Disk or Picture CD for \$7.99 at the time of film processing.

Image Storage

Some photofinishers will create an account for you when you drop off your film if you provide your e-mail address. If this feature is available to you, you will receive e-mail from the photofinisher when your pictures are ready online. This account is free when you use Kodak PhotoNet online or America Online's service.

When a participating Kodak PhotoNet online retailer puts your roll of film online, your pictures will be stored in a high-resolution (1536x1024 pixels) format. Based on your needs, several download resolutions are available in small, medium and large file sizes:

Minimum Resolution (384x256 pixels) images—good for attaching to e-mails, screensavers, and screen backgrounds: Free.

Medium Resolution (768x512 pixels) images—good for documents, software applications and for printing on ink jet printers: Free.

High Resolution (1536x1024 pixels) images—good for high-end graphic projects and printing on professional photo printers. \$1 per downloaded photo. (Kodak PhotoNet online uses high-resolution files for reprints purchased online, but this download charge is not added to the cost of the reprint.)

Viewer Software with Medium Resolution Photos—This is a self-running computer application that allows you to view your images one at a time or in an automatic slide show: \$5.28.

Photo gifts (photo mouse pad, 8x10 photo jigs, T-shirt, calendar, etc.) are available through your photofinisher (prices vary) (A flat shipping fee of \$1.95 per order will be added to your total. Orders are shipped through the postal service and should arrive at their destination within 12-14 days.)

Fujifilm Aladdin Digital Photo Center

- Any combination of photos on one sheet, including borders and text. Approx. \$6.99
Prices of any output-standard prints, sheets and gift items such as calendars, trading cards, greeting cards and other novelty and occasion prints vary.
As a rule of thumb, if the kiosk is connected to the retailer's mini-lab you will be charged the same price as is usual for a reprint. If the retailer is using a Pictography Printer it will cost 6.99 per sheet.
- Transfer images to Fujicolor CDs: \$7.99.
- Connectivity with Fujifilm.Net (film can be uploaded at the time of processing or afterward): \$4.95.

Pixel Magic Imaging's Photo Ditto

Print-to-print, up to three different prints in various configurations on one sheet: \$8.99.

Pix I Magic Imaging Digital Print Station

One 4x6 reprint with border and/or personalized message: \$.99.

BackLab Film Scanning System scans already processed 35mm rolls or strips of film, APS film and mounted 35mm slides, which can be saved to floppy disk or CD: Approx. \$9.99; Burn images from DPS onto a CD-ROM or floppy: Approx. \$9.99.

MyPhotoLab.com Gifts

Prices are set by the photo retailer.

Photo calendars, mugs, mouse pads, T-shirts, china occasion plates and holiday ornaments are available.

Completed orders can either be routed back to the retailer for delivery to the customer or shipped directly to the customer (or selected recipient).

Contacts

Eastman Kodak Company
343 State St.
Rochester, NY 14653
(800) 235-6325
www.kodak.com

Fuji Photo Film USA, Inc.
555 Taxter Road
Elmsford, NY 10523
(800) 378-3854
www.fujifilm.com

Kinko's, Inc. Corporate Office
PO Box 8000
Ventura, CA, USA 93002
(800) 254-6567
www.kinkos.com

Pixel Magic Imaging
631 Mill Street
San Marcos, TX 78666
(800) GO-PIXEL
www.pmimaging.com

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